

**The Passion of Christ in the Church of San Cristóbal de Rapaz:  
An example of Medieval Anti-Jewish Iconography in Colonial Peru?**

François Soyer  
(University of Southampton)

The church of San Cristóbal de Rapaz in Peru would seem to be an unlikely place to find anti-Jewish imagery. Situated in the remote high Andean village of Rapaz, located at an altitude of nearly 4,000 meters above sea level in the province of Oyón, this small village of circa 500 inhabitants lies perched in a natural terrace on a steeply sloping mountain that can still only be reached via a road that snakes its way along hairpin bends whilst hugging the precipitous mountainside.



Map: Location of the village of Rapaz in Peru

Despite its isolation, the village has become famous for two reasons. The first reason is the preservation in the village of a striking *quipu* (or *kipu*): a system of knotted strings used by Andean peoples to record, preserve and transmit accounting information about goods and peoples (Salomon, Brezine, Chapa and Falcón Huayta 2011). The second reason is the remarkable church of San Cristóbal (see plate 1). The edifice was built in the eighteenth century and its dimensions – a single nave structure with no bell tower that is 8.45 meters wide, 27,60 meters long and 10 meters high – make it an imposing construction for such a small village. Its most salient figures are the impressive altar and the painted murals that adorn the outside and inside of the church, covering even the wooden arches that support the church's ceiling. These have been studied and described in detail by the Peruvian historian Arturo Ruiz Estrada who, thanks to inscriptions commemorating the completion of various stages of the construction of the church, dates them to the middle decades of the eighteenth century. One of these murals was completed in 1743 and their completion probably occurred between 1722 and 1761 (Ruiz Estrada 1983).



Plate 1: The Church of San Cristóbal de Rapaz

The interior of the Church of San Cristóbal de Rapaz is a riot of colour and exuberant decoration, with painted murals in a good state of conservation depicting scenes from the New Testament as well as representations of Christ, the Virgin Mary and various Saints (including, unsurprisingly, the eponymous San Cristóbal (Saint Christopher) but also Santiago). The sacred imagery is supplemented with representations of exuberant foliage, real and mythical beasts (lions, deer, exotic birds, two-headed eagles and mermaids) and even a mural depicting a black African woman carrying a basket with a child standing behind her.

The identity of the painter (or painters) remains a mystery. The stylistic uniformity of the murals – which are clearly inspired by Catholic sacred art in their depiction of human figures and vegetation but which favour two-dimensional scenes and features numerous local/native protagonists – has led Arturo Ruiz Estrada to conclude that the artist must have indisputably been an indigenous inhabitant of eighteenth-century Peru. There are no grounds to dispute such a conclusion and indeed the remote location of the church makes it more plausible that a native artist, or artists, would have been sourced to produce these artworks. Their style conforms to that of the ‘Cusco school’ (*Escuela Cuzqueña*) that spread throughout the Andes in the colonial period but the lack of precision in the artist's technique and a bold directness indicate an artist with far lesser abilities than other well-known masters of the style. It is important not to overlook the possibility that the artist or artists may well have been creating images on the basis of instructions given to them by those responsible for

commissioning the artworks. Some inscriptions below a few murals provide the name of the patrons who “ordered the image to be painted”, doubtless a reference to their monetary contribution, which paid for the artists’ wages. It does not appear farfetched, therefore, to suggest that such patrons may well have influenced the iconography of the murals (Ruiz Estrada 1983).

The two murals that concern this article are situated on the left-hand side of the church nave (on the western wall) and the names of their patrons (if there were any) are not recorded. They represent two scenes from the Passion of Christ. In the first one (see plate 2), a bloodied but stoic and haloed Jesus Christ is depicted as suffering a flagellation administered by one individual holding some sort of multi-tailed whip whilst two other men hold ropes that appear to be attached to Christ’s bound hands. Although it was traditional in Christian art to depict Christ as attached to a pillar, the latter is not visible in this depiction.



Plate 2: Christ Flagellated (Church of San Cristóbal de Rapaz)

The second mural represents the fifth Station of the Cross (see plate 3). Christ, is now bearing the crown of thorns whilst making his way to his crucifixion on Calvary. An inscription (“here he fell for the first time”) informs us that the scene represents the moment related in the gospels of Matthew (27:32), Mark (15:21) and Luke (23:26): when Christ stumbled under the weigh of the cross and the Romans escorting him compelled the Jew Simon of Cyrene to take the cross from Christ and carry it. Christ’s face seems to betray little emotion. The other two protagonists of the scene are two men, one of whom is seizing the cross and is clearly Simon of Cyrene whilst the other threatens the Messiah, his upraised right hand hold a menacing lash whilst he grasps a nondescript weapon (possibly a dagger or sword) in the other. A second inscription beneath Jesus Christ reminds the beholder that Christ had walked 80 paces (200 feet) from the moment the cross was placed on his back to the one when he stumbled under its weigh.



Plate 3: Simon of Cyrene takes the cross from Christ.  
(Church of San Cristóbal de Rapaz)

This article argues that the murals depicting the flagellation of Christ and the moment when Christ stumbled under the weigh of the cross offer rare and startling evidence of the survival of the representation of Jews in medieval European iconography in a context where we would not expect it: colonial Peru. An analysis of the murals argues that the figures surrounding Christ are stereotyped representations of Jews who are identified by the wearing of distinctive headgear and possibly even by their elongated noses (a classic anti-Semitic trope). The article then turns to another two problems: Why would a native artist in Peru have resorted to such imagery? Was there a specific context in eighteenth-century Peru that would account for such a decision?

### **The Figure of the Jew at San Cristóbal de Rapaz: Hats and Noses**

In both murals, the five figures surrounding Jesus Christ are dressed in eighteenth-century European clothing. Despite this, there are two visual cues that clearly sets them apart from other individuals depicted in the church: the first is the wearing of distinctive headgear and the second is what would appear to be that infamous anti-Semitic physiognomic stereotype: the elongated outsized ‘Jewish’ nose.

The distinctive headgear of all of the individuals in the two murals is probably the first detail to strike the observer. The men wear peculiar headgear similar to peaked caps or even a hardened hat/helmet of some description. In the case of three of them, their headgear is topped by a small ball or borble and two of the hats appear clearly to be conical in shape:



Plate 4: Detail from the scene of the Flagellation of Christ



Plate 5: Detail from the scene of Simon of Cyrene taking the Cross from Christ

Only one of the figures, one of the two men holding the ropes with which Christ in bound, wears what is a more recognizable eighteenth-century hat:



Plate 6: Detail from the scene of the Flagellation of Christ

The strange headgear worn by the four men does not appear in any other mural within or without the church of Rapaz. Some observers might be tempted to conclude that the headgear is merely an attempt to represent the helmets worn by Roman soldiers. Some Baroque representations of the Flagellation of Christ represented Christ's tormentors in military gear and a Peruvian example can be seen today in the Franciscan

Church of Virgin de los Dolores in Arequipa but the practice was not particularly widespread. The Gospels – John (19:1), Mark (14:65), Matthew (27:26) and Luke (22:63-65) – are fairly ambiguous about the precise identity of the men who flagellated Christ. It appears logical to argue that the men who lashed Christ must have been Roman soldiers obeying Pilate’s command rather than Jewish officials as judicial lashings prior to crucifixion were part of the normal Roman judicial procedure. The western iconographic tradition, however, has not adopted a fixed motif and since the Middle Ages and in European art the flagellators have been variously represented as Roman soldiers with helmets, breastplates and cuirasses, men not wearing any noticeable military gear or even as stereotyped Jews. Moreover, the possibility that the headgear may be crude representations of Roman helmets seems to be entirely nullified by the fact that the figure of a Jewish bystander, Simon of Cyrene, taking the cross from Christ’s shoulders, is also depicted wearing one of the peculiar headpieces.

The unusual headgear actually bears a very strong resemblance to the ‘Jewish hat’ (German *Judenhut*; Latin *pileus cornutus* (“horned skullcap”)) that Jews are frequently depicted as wearing in medieval European illuminations and artworks. Indeed, as Sara Lipton has recently pointed out in her magisterial work on the visual representations of Jews in medieval Europe, the unusual ‘Jewish hat’ became an identifying marker for Jews in European iconography:

When Christian artists finally began to single out Jews, they did, somewhat anticlimactically, with a hat. As any handbook of medieval iconography will attest, and as any glance at an illuminated manuscript or stained glass window from the later twelfth or thirteenth century makes clear, Jews can be recognized in high medieval art by various versions of the pointed or peaked headgear known sometimes as the *pileum cornutum* (horned cap) or simply as the “Jewish hat”. This hat first appeared on the head of painted Jews in the eleventh century and by about 1150 had become the sign *par excellence* of the Jew. (Lipton 2014, 16)

This striking iconographic trend thus slightly predates the fourth Lateran Council (1215), which imposed distinctive clothing, but not hats, on Jews and Muslims living in Christian kingdoms in an effort to segregate them and minimize social (and prevent sexual) intercourse between Christians and members of the two others faiths. The wearing of compulsory peaked and yellow hats in Vienna was decreed by a synod held there in 1267 and for Jews dwelling in Rome by an edict of Pope Paul IV in 1555. In Venice, Jews were compelled to wear yellow or red hats from the end of the fifteenth century. The *Judenhut/pileus cornutus* became a ubiquitous iconographic identifier of Jews although there was no single standardized version of it. It was nearly always in the form of a peaked cap or hat and often represented with a round borble either attached directly to its peak or, sometimes, to the top of a stiff stem extending vertically from the summit of the headgear. The cap itself appears to have been either hard like a quasi-helmet or soft like a Phrygian cap. The following are only four examples amongst many:



Plate 7: Detail from the Codex Manesse Süßkind von Trimberg, Zürich, ca. 1300-1340 (Heidelberg University Library, Cod. Pal. germ. 848) (Meister des Codex Manesse (Nachtragsmaler I))<sup>1</sup>



Plate 8: Jew crucifying Christ, detail from a fourteenth-century Mural fourteenth-century church of Saint Catherine in Landau in der Pfalz (Germany)<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3ACodex\\_Manesse\\_S%C3%BC%C3%9Fkind\\_von\\_Trimberg.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3ACodex_Manesse_S%C3%BC%C3%9Fkind_von_Trimberg.jpg).

<sup>2</sup> [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3ALandau\\_066.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3ALandau_066.jpg).



Plate 9: Fourteenth-century mural of the flagellation of Christ (restored in 1899) from the church of Parkentin (northern Germany)<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3AParkentin\\_Kirche\\_Malerei\\_am\\_Chorbogen.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3AParkentin_Kirche_Malerei_am_Chorbogen.jpg).



Plate 10: Jewish Scholars, illustration from *Der Seelen-Wurzgarten*, woodcut, 1483.  
(Yale University Art Gallery)

It is worth noting that, somewhat shockingly, the memory of the *Judenhut* is perpetuated by its use in the portrayal of the head of a stereotyped Jew that still constitutes the official coat of arms of the town of Judenburg in Styria, Austria (see plate 11).



Plate 11: Official coat of Arms of the town of Judenburg (Austria), 1930s (left) and post 1959 (right)<sup>4</sup>

Whilst the tradition of depicting Jews wearing distinctive peaked hats was well established in northern Europe, the same cannot be said of the medieval and early modern Iberian world. As Norman Roth has pointed out, there is no evidence that Sephardic Jews were compelled to wear distinguishing headgear although they too were subject to a raft of segregationist legislation in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (Roth 2003, 174). Iberian Jews were forced to wear distinguishing symbols on their clothes but not distinctive hats. This does not mean, however, that the ‘Jewish hat’ was completely absent from the iconography of the Iberian Peninsula. Representations of Jews in medieval Iberian illuminations, murals and altarpieces usually identify Jews by their hoods but the ‘Jewish hat’ does appear and assume the role of a visual cue (Patton 2012, 25-36). As Pamela Patton has argued in her analysis of iconographical representations of Jews in medieval Spain:

Pointed hats could play a primarily denotative role in Iberian imagery well into the thirteenth and fourteenth century, most often in the depiction of Old testament patriarchs or other positive Jewish figures. (...) the Jew’s hat in such Iberian manuscripts often seems intended simply to identify Jews as Jews.... (Patton 2012, 26)

Distinctive Jewish hats appear in the illuminated manuscript of the thirteenth-century *Cantigas de Santa Maria*, a collection of 420 poems relating miracles of the Virgin Mary compiled by King Alfonso X in the thirteenth century. For many examples and illustrations of the ‘Jewish hat’ in the *Cantigas* see Pamela Patton, *Art of Estrangement. Redefining Jews in Reconquest Spain* (Patton 2012). The Jews featured in a fourteenth-century altarpiece of Saint Mark, in the Catalan cathedral of Manresa, similarly wear eye-catching pointed hats (Mann 2010, 82-5). In the neighbouring kingdom of Portugal, there exists a very interesting example of the denotative role of

<sup>4</sup> [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Coat\\_of\\_Arms\\_of\\_Judenburg.svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Coat_of_Arms_of_Judenburg.svg).

the ‘Jewish hat’ in the main portal of the Gothic cathedral of Évora in the Alentejo province, which mostly dates from the turn of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The portal features statues of the Apostles and the corbel supporting one of them features two striking characters: a bearded man and a dog-head man who are both clearly identifiable as Jews because they are wearing a peaked ‘Jewish hat’ (see plate 12).



Plate 12: A man and a dog wearing ‘Jewish hats’.  
Main Portal of the Cathedral of Évora (Portugal)

For reasons that are not clear, the iconographic representation of the ‘Jewish hat’ appears to have almost disappeared in the Iberian world after the middle of the fourteenth century. Interestingly, as Paulino Rodríguez Barral has discovered, one of the few post-1350 Iberian works with woodcut illustrations to depict Jews wearing the *pileum cornutum* is an eschatological work printed in Zaragoza in 1497 and entitled *libro del Anticristo*, which was clearly influenced by an earlier German book with the same title and subject (Rodríguez Barral 2008, 241-7). Portrayals of Jews and *conversos* (the descendants of converted Jews) in Spanish artworks of the early modern (post-1500) period usually present them in unremarkable clothing, even when they are presented as committing acts of religious sacrilege or ritual murder, as the examples below attest (see plates 13 and 14)



Plate 13: Jews and *conversos* torturing the Holy Child of La Guardia .  
Rodrigo de Yepes, *Historia de la muerte y glorioso martirio del Santo Innocente que llaman de la Guardia* (Madrid, 1583), fol. 31v



Plate 14: Portuguese *conversos* scourging a crucifix of Christ in Madrid.  
Francisco de Rojas Nieto, *Vespertinas de los opprobios de la Pasión de Cristo* (Madrid, 1634). Printed with the kind permission of the Bibliotheca Sefarad

Like in Spain, the 'Jewish hat' is almost entirely absent from visual representations of Jews produced in Spain's American colonies. The church in Rapaz is actually one of only two exceptions that I have been able to find. The other case in

which a Jew was represented with distinctive headgear is that of a polychrome statue of Simon of Cyrene, supposedly dating from the sixteenth century, that is venerated in the Dominican church of Tunja in northern Colombia and paraded through the streets during the *Semana Santa* before Easter Sunday (see plate 15).



Plate 15: Polychrome statue of Simon of Cyrene, Tunja, Colombia

These two Hispano-American representations of Simon of Cyrene wearing a ‘Jewish hat’ seem, to my knowledge, unique in the Iberian world. Other surviving early modern Spanish polychrome sculptures of Simon of Cyrene that were designed to be exposed to the faithful in churches and paraded during the *Semana Santa* – such as, to name only one example, the famous sculpture by Francisco Ruiz Gijón exhibited in the Church of San Isidoro in Seville (1687) – do not represent him wearing any headgear. Simon of Cyrene is usually represented in ordinary (though often anachronistic) clothing that distinguishes him clearly from any Roman soldiers. The extraordinary similarity in style between the statue of Simon of Cyrene in Tunja and the image of Simon represented on the walls of the church in Rapaz defies belief that this could be a mere coincidence.

Another striking element of the murals in Rapaz is the physiognomic stereotyping of the men surrounding Christ. Four out of the five men are portrayed with elongated noses (see plates 4, 5 and 6). It is now a well-established fact that the caricatured portrayal of Jews with elongated and/or crooked noses also has its roots in the High Middle Ages (Lipton 2014, 104-110). In Spain, this iconographic practice is also readily apparent in many medieval illuminations and murals from the later part of

the thirteenth century (Patton 2012, 67-101). Even if this historical context were not sufficient in itself, one can easily compare the men surrounding Christ with the other human individuals depicted in the church. The four men are practically the only ones in the church whose faces are represented in profile as the artist(s) clearly had a preference for depicting their subjects full-face with two eyes visible (much like Christ in the two murals that this article analyses). A comparison with the other human faces depicted in profile, those of the African woman and child (mentioned above) as well as a tonsured European friar located beneath them, appears to strengthen this conclusion. In contrast, their noses seem proportionate to their faces when compared to those of the Jews (see plate 16). It is only the devils portrayed in another mural of the church who have more explicitly grotesque noses than those of the Jews (see plate 17).



Plate 16: An African woman and child; Native woman with tonsured friars (Church of San Cristóbal de Rapaz)



Plate 17: Devils seizing a sinful woman (Church of San Cristóbal de Rapaz)

### The Anti-*Converso* Context in Colonial Peru

Whether the decision to resort to medieval iconography was taken by the artist or those who commissioned the murals, the question of why Jews were selected to become the principal protagonists in this depiction of Christ's flagellation rather than Romans legionnaires deserves to be considered. Artworks are rarely produced in cultural isolation and an examination of the contemporary social and religious context in which these murals were produced may offer some clues.

The Jews were expelled from Spain in 1492 and from Portugal in 1497 but their converted descendants, the *conversos*, continued to be suspected (rightly or wrongly) of secretly practicing Judaism ('judaizing') and were the object of inquisitorial persecution as a result. Wary of the spread of judaizing to the New World, the Spanish Crown sought to prevent the migration of *conversos* to the American colonies. A royal edit promulgated in 1508 (and frequently re-issued later) prohibited the emigration of "the descendants of Jews and Muslims burned or reconciled [by the Inquisition], up to the fourth generation". The royal agency based in Seville that was responsible for the enforcement of the monopoly on trade between Europe and the Spanish Empire (the *Casa de Contratación*) was also given the responsibility of carrying out checks into the racial pedigree of potential migrants. Its efforts, however, seem to have been thwarted not only by corruption and the illegal migration of Portuguese *conversos* from Brazil to Peru via the port of Buenos Aires but also by the indebted Spanish Crown itself, which legalized *post facto* the presence of many *conversos* in exchange of monetary payments (Escobar Quevedo 2008, 42-4).

Many *conversos* of Portuguese origin were attracted to the Spanish colonies after the union of the Portuguese and Spanish crowns in 1580 and created conditions that were propitious for the establishment of long-distance trading networks linking both empires. The high demand for African slaves that could only be sourced via the Portuguese trading outposts in western Africa also created opportunities for the *conversos*. The Spanish viceroy in Peru estimated in 1642, that their number in Lima and its port Callao was "around five hundred" and recent research by Maria da Graça Mateus Ventura has identified 1,400 Portuguese (though not all of them would have been *conversos*) scattered throughout the viceroyalty of Peru between 1580 and 1640

(Ventura 2005). Some of these Portuguese *conversos* became wealthy and even powerful, most notably the slave importer Manuel Bautista Pérez in Peru, who was known in Lima as the “*gran capitán*” (i.e. *de facto* leader) of the Portuguese *converso* community. Most, however, earned their sustenance as perambulating merchants (Quevedo 2008; Minchin 1998; Newson and Minchin 2007).

The psychological impact that the *conversos* had on colonial Peru society was significant. As the Spanish monarchy’s military might slowly declined in the first half of the seventeenth century, the presence of a large community of Portuguese *conversos* in the Americas provoked considerable fears of possible plots to subvert the Spanish Empire. Fuelled by conspiracy theories that blamed the *conversos* for the fall of the Brazilian port of Bahia to the Protestant Dutch in 1624, the *conversos* were suspected by many of plotting to rebel against the Crown and hand over Peru to the Dutch. The 1630s and 1640s were decades marked by near panic amongst Spanish governing circles in the colonies, partly fuelled by the widespread circulation of rumours of *converso* treachery. When gunpowder was stolen from a warehouse in Lima in 1641, a Peruvian inquisitor claimed without any tangible proof in a letter to his superiors in Madrid that this could only be the work of Portuguese *conversos*, who “had been in communication with the Dutch and were waiting for them” and who were plotting to “blow up the city [of Lima]” (Silverblatt 2004, 149). The Spanish viceroy, for his part, fantasized in his correspondence with the Crown about a general uprising organized by the treacherous *conversos* in which they would lead an army of African slaves and indigenous Peruvians (Schwartz 2008, 181-3). In Peru, the Inquisition waged a coordinated campaign of persecution against the *conversos* from 1635 onwards. Alongside their colleagues in the tribunals of Cartagena and Mexico further north, the inquisitors of Lima told their superiors in Madrid that they had dismantled a “great conspiracy” (*grande complicidad*) of judaizing that treacherously linked all *converso* communities in the Americas to the Sephardic Jews in Amsterdam (Schaposchnik, 2015).

The fear of the *conversos* went much deeper than just the threat of political treachery. As alleged judaizers, they were accused of seeking to covertly undermine the Christian faith at every possible opportunity through various rituals. One of the most common allegations in Spain was that *converso* families and communities ritually desecrated, stabbed, flogged or whipped crucifixes. In Spain, the case of the *Cristo de la Paciencia* (the “patient” or “suffering” Christ) is doubtless the most notorious example. The Inquisition arrested the members of a Portuguese *converso* family residing in Madrid in 1629 after receiving information offered by a small child from that family according to whom they had organised a secret meeting during which a large crucifix was ritually flogged and burned. Moreover, it was alleged that the wooden Christ on the crucifix had miraculously admonished them three times for their conduct. Convicted of “the greatest atrocity ever seen”, the leaders of the family were sentenced to death during an enormous *auto-de-fé* held in the Plaza Mayor of Madrid in 1632, in the presence of King Philip IV, his minister and favourite Olivares, and a vast throng of assembled courtiers (Pulido Serrano 2002; Gómez de Mora 1632, 14v).

The libel of systematic and ritual desecration of crucifixes also found fertile ground in colonial Peru. Confessions of religious desecration were extorted from many of those arrested by the Peruvian Inquisition in the 1630s. Of particular interest is the story of the discovery of a group of Portuguese judaizers, led by a man named Pedro Montero de Espinosa, who gathered at night to desecrate a representation of Christ in an inn of the Andean town of Cuzco, which served as their secret synagogue. The tale, which supposedly took place in the 1630s or 1640s, appears to be largely legendary as

it is practically impossible to establish its veracity from contemporary documentary records. A number of Portuguese *conversos* residing in Cuzco were arrested by the Inquisition between 1639 and 1641 but there is no surviving inquisitorial record of an incident matching the legend (Castañeda Delgado and Pilar Hernández Aparicio 1995, 437-8). Moreover, this alleged act of sacrilege is recorded in later sources with contradictory details, such as whether the desecrated object was a crucifix or a painting of Christ. The main version of the legend claims that the crucifix was ritually whipped during Jewish gatherings on the Sabbath but another version adds that the *converso* Montero also attacked the image when he was infuriated by gambling losses. It may well be that the story is a retelling of the famous Spanish *Cristo de la Paciencia* incident, described above, mixed with local details. Certainly, it is tempting to see a link, if only due to a similarity in the names of the protagonist, with a case prosecuted by the Peruvian Inquisition in 1700. An individual named Don Pedro Espinosa de los Monteros, who was not a *converso* but who claimed to have been influenced by the Devil, was prosecuted by the Inquisition in Lima for supposedly having whipped and desecrated a crucifix due to his frustration at his poverty (Toribio Medina 1956, 201-2). Whatever the truth about the origins of the legend, it rapidly became part of local popular Peruvian folklore. The street in which the Portuguese heretics supposedly resided still bears the name of *Tambo de Montero* (“the inn of Montero”) and a crucifix known as *El Señor del Tambo de Montero* is still preserved in the Mercedarian church of Cuzco and remains the object of popular veneration to this day alongside an image of Christ with seven stab marks, the *Santo Cristo Señor de las 7 Puñaladas* (Esquivel y Navia 1901, 83; Matto de Turner 1976, 11-3; Elorrieta de Aranzábal 1954, II 225-6).

There existed an atmosphere of anti-Jewish sentiment in colonial Peru after 1700 that was propitious for the recycling of anti-Jewish iconography. Fear of the judaizing *converso* – the secret Jew – did not disappear from Peru in the eighteenth century. On the contrary it survived long after the anti-*converso* trials of the seventeenth century. The inquisitorial persecution of *conversos* continued into the first half of the 1700s albeit at a much-reduced rate as, between 1700 and 1749, only 7 suspected judaizers were prosecuted by the Inquisition in Peru compared to, for instance, 83 prosecutions for bigamy. Moreover, this number pales in comparison with the 93 trials of suspected judaizers between 1636 and 1667, which represents nearly 50% of all cases prosecuted in this earlier period (Millar Carvacho 1998, 474-6).

Statistics do not, however, tell the whole story. María Ana de Castro, a *conversa* of Portuguese origin and high-society courtesan who was arrested in 1726 and imprisoned for a decade, became the most famous victim of the Peruvian Inquisition in the eighteenth century. The desecration of a representation of Christ as part of a ‘Jewish ritual’ was one of the many charges held against María, who ultimately suffered the fate of being paraded through the streets of Lima before being burned at the stake in front of a huge crowd during an *auto de fé* held on 23 December 1736, becoming the last person to be condemned to death by the Inquisition in Peru (Bermúdez de la Torre y Solier 1737, 158v-159r) (Williams 2008). Even after 1750, the inquisitors continued to open investigations (and especially between 1770 and 1776) against various men and women who were highly unlikely to have any *converso* ancestry but were still suspected of being secret Jews. These investigations did not lead to trials but are linked by a common accusation: that the accused had flogged or whipped an image of Jesus Christ (Millar Carvacho 1998, 401-6). One startling example demonstrates the power of the association of *conversos* with the purportedly religiously-motivated desecration of religious images. When a woman visiting a shop in the town of Piura (northern Peru) in 1773 stepped upon a crucifix that had been negligently left on the floor of the shop,

she was outraged by what she considered to be the impious treatment of such a sacred object. In her anger, she immediately denounced the shopkeeper to the Inquisition, claiming that it was “only Jews who would do such a thing” (*solo judíos hacían esso*).<sup>5</sup> Likewise, a mixed-race (Afro-European) man born in the Dutch colony of Curaçao (where Jews were tolerated by the Protestant Dutch) was arrested by the inquisitorial commissary in Quito (modern Ecuador) and accused by witnesses of being “the son of Jews” and “professing the sect of Moses”. Upon examining the evidence, however, the inquisitors found that the man had only aroused the suspicions of the witnesses by failing to worship in the same way as other members of the congregation in Church and the case was, accordingly, dismissed.<sup>6</sup> What such striking cases reveal is that the fantasized figure of the Jew or *judaizante* continued to preoccupy and linger in the popular imagination in the viceroyalty of Peru in the second-half of the eighteenth century. An interesting comparison could be made with the figure of the Jew that survived in literature and art in medieval and early modern England during the centuries that separate the expulsion of the Jews in 1290 and their readmission in 1655 (Bale 2006 and Holmberg 2011).

The artist or artists responsible for the murals at San Cristóbal de Rapaz therefore lived in a society with a widely held fear of Judaism and belief that *conversos* practiced a crypto-Judaism that ritually desecrated crucifixes in a parody of the real crucifixion. The famous desecration of the *Tambo de Montero* in Cuzco was commemorated in both iconography and poetry, as a remarkable anonymous eighteenth-century Peruvian painting demonstrates. It depicts the desecration of a crucifix in the inn of Montero, with *converso* men sitting in small relaxed groups – conversing, smoking and drinking in a dark room lit only by a pair of candles and a lamp – whilst one of them flogs the back of a life-sized statue of Christ taken from a crucifix that lies facing the floor. The twelve *conversos* are dressed in the high fashion of well-to-do eighteenth-century European merchants and seven of them wear what appears to be an unusual soft hat or bonnet although not one that is similar to those depicted in Rapaz. Below the scene, fulfilling the role of an explanatory caption, there is a short poem recording in verse the infamous sacrileges perpetrated by the “twelve Jews” (see plate 18).

<sup>5</sup> A.H.N., *Sección Inquisición*, legajo 1,649, exp. 32.

<sup>6</sup> A.H.N., *Sección Inquisición*, legajos 1,623, exp. 10 and 1,649, exp. 31.

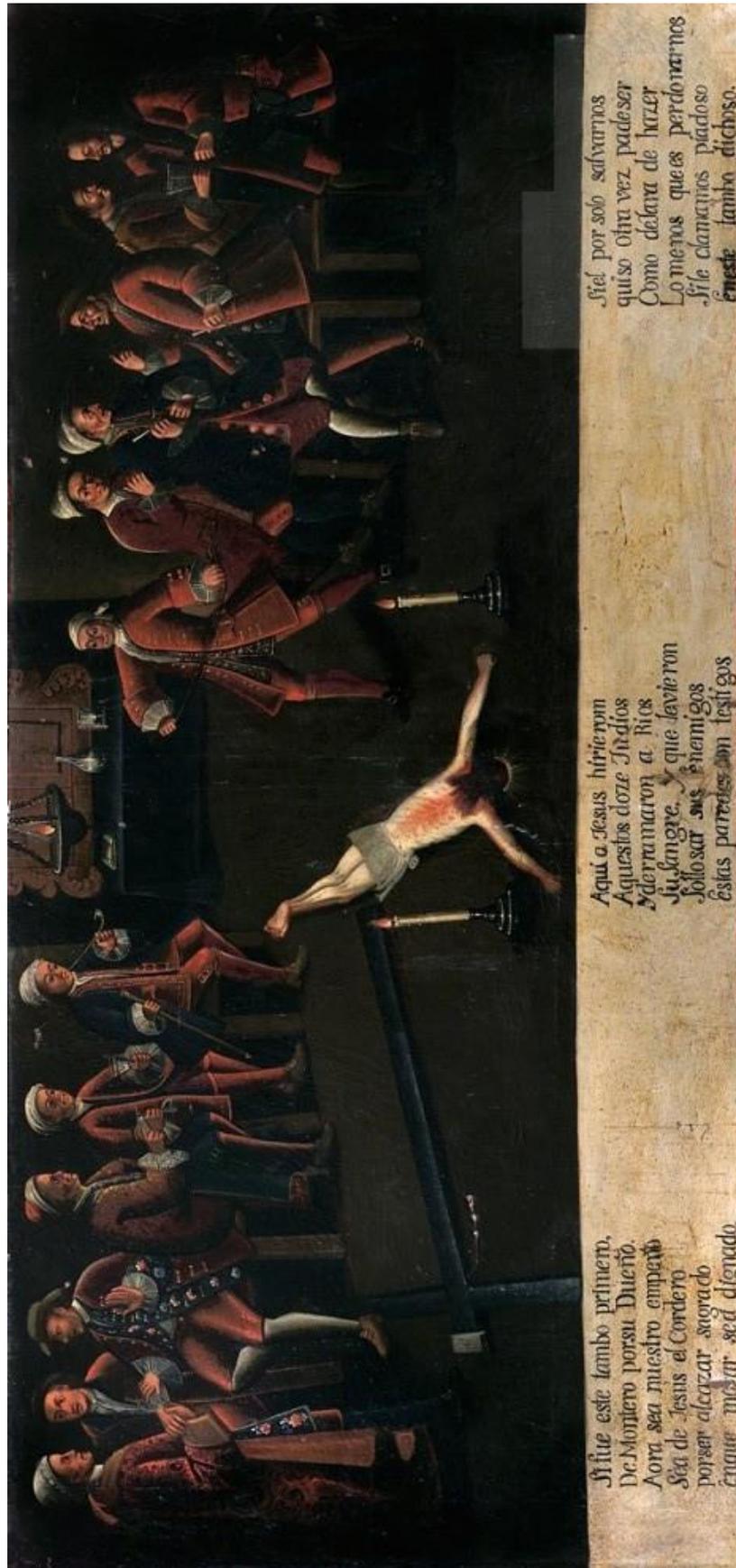


Plate 19: Flagellation of a Crucifix by *conversos* in the Tambo de Montero (Cuzco)  
Anonymous XVIIIth century painting. Museo Histórico Regional de Cuzco  
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### Conclusion: the Problem of Artistic Lineage and an Intriguing Theory

This article has endeavoured to establish that the murals in Rapaz depict Jews and to situate their creation within its social and religious context. I am confident that the similarity of the headgear depicted in Rapaz with the *Judenhut*/headgear in European artworks and the fact that Simon of Cyrene, who is clearly a Jew and would never have been represented as a Roman soldier, is represented with the distinctive headgear positively identifies the wearers as Jews.

One important question that may well always remain unanswered concerns the identification of the precise iconographic source(s) that inspired the artist to portray Jews wearing 'Jewish hats' in colonial Peru. Without knowing the precise identity of the artist or artists responsible for the two murals in the church of San Cristóbal de Rapaz or the names of any individuals who commissioned them, it is only possible to speculate. As there appears to be no comparable depiction of Jews in colonial Peru apart from that of Simon of Cyrene in Tunja, two possibilities arise:

1. The artist(s) or commissioning patron(s) may have observed the statue of Simon of Cyrene in Tunja and used it as their source of inspiration to depict Jews in Rapaz.
2. Alternatively, and equally feasibly, the artist(s) or commissioning patron(s) may have observed an engraving of Jews wearing 'Jewish hats' imported into Peru from northern Europe or Italy and used this as an artistic template.

The second option, that the artwork was inspired by a print imported from Europe (including northern Europe), is entirely plausible. Modern research into the circulation of prints and artworks across the Atlantic has demonstrated that they played a major role in influencing local artists in the American colonies of the Spanish Empire. Various mural paintings in the church of Andahuaylillas, southeast of Cusco, have been linked to various European prints, one of which seems to have served as a model (Rodríguez Romero 2012 and 2013). The Project on the Engraved Sources of Spanish Colonial Art (funded by the University of California at Davis) has found over 3500 correspondences between prints imported (via Spain) from northern Europe and paintings in colonial Latin America. Many paintings produced for cathedrals and churches were little more than reproductions, augmented in size and with some variation in detail, of the prints from which the painters sought their inspiration. In some prints, Jews are depicted at such moments in the story of Christ's life as during his judgment or his flagellation and they are made distinguishable by the fact that they are wearing conspicuous headgear. The headgear is not quite the *judenhut* topped with a borble but rather a soft hat similar to that featured in the painting of the desecration of a crucifix in the inn of Montero produced in Cuzco during the 1700s (and discussed above). A good example of this is the print of the flagellation of Christ by the Flemish artist Hieronymus Wierix (1548-1624), which was copied by many Peruvian artists (plate 19). It is worth noting that the representation of fantasized 'Muslims' (*moros*) and 'Turcs' (*turcos*) in religious paintings produced in colonial Peru and exhibited in Andean churches also reproduced certain Iberian artistic topoi and cues about Muslims, using exotic or distinctive headgear and/or clothes to mark them out as infidels (Mújica Pinilla 2007; Iglesias 2014). In the church of Rapaz, a mural that depicts a Muslim fleeing from Santiago Matamoros represents the *moro* in what appears to be a North African burnoose.



Plate 19: The flagellation of Christ by Hieronymus Wierix (1548-1624),  
*Evangelicæ Historiæ Imagines* by Jerome Nadal  
 (Antwerp: Martin Nuyts II, 1593)

To name but one illustrative example, Wierix was the source of inspiration for the 1768 painting of the Flagellation and the Crown of Thorns by Isidoro de Moncada that presently hangs in the Iglesia de San Francisco in Ayaviri (southern Peru). Until further

evidence comes to light, these two hypotheses will remain just that: speculative theories. Nonetheless, it is possible to draw some interesting conclusions about the remarkable if puzzling murals in San Cristóbal de Rapaz.

Determining the artistic lineage for the murals of Rapaz is just one problem. The motivation(s) that compelled the artist or patrons to follow this unusual (for colonial America) artistic model presents another puzzle.

- Was it merely a manifestation of the wish to include a fantasized ‘Jewish other’ in the bible story that was being presented to a native Peruvian congregation?
- Was it a manifestation of anti-*converso* sentiment and/or fear of a fantasized Jew that existed in eighteenth-century Peru?
- Was it even, perhaps, something ever more striking: a covert critique of Spanish colonial rule?

The fact that Jews are depicted wearing distinctive headgear in colonial South America long after the practice had fallen into disuse in European iconography is, at the very least, a powerful demonstration of the enduring place that the figure of the Jew has occupied in the Christian imagination. Sara Lipton has recently reminded us that we should take care not to forget that stereotyped iconographic representations of Jews in medieval art did not just aim to inspire and/or perpetuate violent anti-Jewish discourse. Rather medieval artists did so “when they needed to see and understand the material world” by turning to “a figure that had long stood for materialism and fleshy ritual” (Lipton 2014, 279-280). This opens the door for another speculative interpretation of the murals in which the ‘Jew’ may have stood in as a proxy for the white Spaniard.

Regarding this possibility, that of a native critique of Spanish rule, it is important to remember that the figure of the Jew haunted the Spanish imagination in the American colonies. When debating the origins of the indigenous populations of the Americas, some Spaniards speculated that they were descended from the ten lost tribes of ancient Israel. They based their theory upon various argument including, it would appear, some who absurdly thought the similarity between the Spanish words *indio* (Indian) and *judío* (Jew) was significant (La Calancha 1639, 39). Ironically, the image of the Jew also came to influence how the conquered indigenous population perceived their European masters. The flagellation of Christ was a popular theme in sacred art produced in colonial Peru (as indeed it was in Spain itself). Beyond its unusual presence in murals and paintings on the walls of churches, its popularity underpinned the legend and cult of *El Señor de Huanca* (“Our lord of Huanca”). Arising from the miraculous visions of a flagellated Christ experienced by a native Peruvian peasant in 1675 after he had witnessed a Spaniard mistreating a native laborer, the cult of *El Señor de Huanca* was popular amongst native Peruvians. Moreover, there exists interesting evidence that some native Peruvians explicitly compared the Spaniards with the Jews tormenting Christ. During the indigenous rebellion led Juan Santos Atahualpa against Spanish rule in central Peru between 1742 and 1756, some of his followers stated during their trial for treason that the Spaniards had “imitated the Jews” in their dealings with native Peruvians (Navarro 82). Could a native artist, working in roughly the same time period, therefore have been projecting native Peruvian frustrations about colonial Spanish rule in general, and the brutality of the Spanish settlers in particular, by representing Spaniards as Jews in the Church of Rapaz? Apart from their peculiar headgear, the Jews are dressed in the eighteenth-century European clothing worn by Spanish settlers in Peru. Such an interpretation of the murals in Rapaz would conform to what the political scientist and anthropologist James C. Scott has termed the “ideological resistance” of

subordinate groups (Scott 1990). Such a theory, which goes beyond the realm of Christian-Jewish relations, is an attractive one but, like so much else relating to the paintings in Rapaz, it remains pure speculation. It was common for artists to anachronistically depict the protagonists of biblical scenes in the clothing of their historical period and there is absolutely no reason to suppose that a native artist or his patrons would have thought it odd to depict the Jews of the New Testament in eighteenth-century clothes.

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